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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [PTER](#) [AG](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: SRAP HOLBROOKE'S STRATEGIC DIALOGUE IN RUSSIA

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT

1. (C) In meetings with Russia's Foreign Ministry and Security Council, SRAP Holbrooke stated that "history and destiny" have given the United States and Russia the common problem of Afghanistan and it is time to use the new relationship between Washington and Moscow to cooperate more closely in Afghanistan. Each Russian interlocutor welcomed the strategic dialogue on Afghanistan and sought more details on American strategy, particularly the presence of U.S. troops. The Russians expressed skepticism about the prospects for reconciliation with the Taliban and therefore urged caution in de-listing individuals from the 1267 roster. The Russian Security Council representative voiced skepticism that adding more ISAF troops would reduce the insurgency and expressed deep concern that Pakistan's military remains intent on undermining Afghanistan. The MFA also embraced the idea of more international engagement on Afghanistan. Holbrooke said the U.S. would consider Russia's proposal to explore cooperation through the CSTO while Russia continued to insist that OSCE activities stop at the Afghan border. GOR officials also disagreed with the U.S. reversal on poppy eradication as a tool in fighting the drug trade.

2. (C) Despite tactical differences, the highest levels of the GOR have gone on record supporting U.S. goals in Afghanistan and that message is being echoed by these key interlocutors, who each called for more joint work on counter-narcotics, economic development and military training and assistance. Leveraging high-level Russian goodwill into increased assistance on the ground in Afghanistan will require extensive follow-up, including through the Bilateral Presidential Commission. While on-the-ground assistance will be modest at best, this type of high-level strategic dialogue will pay dividends as diplomacy intensifies because if Russia feels it is truly involved in decision-making it is far more likely to play a constructive political role. End summary and comment

U.S. STRATEGY, RUSSIAN REACTIONS

3. (C) During a two-day visit to Moscow November 16-17, SRAP Holbrooke held three separate strategic-level conversations (totaling over six hours) with Deputy Foreign Ministers Borodavkin and Sergey Ryabkov and Deputy Secretary of the Security Council, Vladimir Nazarov. In each meeting, Holbrooke underscored the U.S. strategic objectives of defeating Al Qaeda (AQ), disrupting the Taliban and strengthening Afghan institutions while also working regionally to prevent hostilities between Pakistan and India.

He discussed the policy review now nearing conclusion in Washington and said that, whatever the outcome, the U.S. strategy will involve an increase of ISAF combat forces, ramped-up training of Afghan military and police and a long-term commitment to provide economic assistance. He also noted that following Karzai's inauguration this week plans to step up international diplomacy among Afghanistan's neighbors and other key partners, including Russia. Holbrooke accented the importance of U.S.-Russian cooperation, noting that "history and destiny" had given our two countries unique responsibilities in Afghanistan and we must never again abandon that country.

¶4. (C) Borodavkin agreed with the focus on security-forces training: "if we expect Afghanistan to be a state, it must rely on its own security forces." In the meantime, he said, Russia supports ISAF's presence and fully endorses the goal of destroying AQ. Borodavkin also posed a series of questions, which served to highlight the GOR's main areas of concern: What are U.S. strategic goals and practical military objectives in the medium- and long-term? Is there an exit strategy? What is the vision for Afghanistan's international posture following the withdrawal of foreign troops? Is the U.S. planning to stand by the Karzai government? What is the view regarding reconciliation with the Taliban? Is it true ISAF forces have been in contact with them? What is the U.S. position on an international conference on Afghanistan? What would be the deliverables?

¶5. (C) Nazarov expressed interest in hearing Holbrooke's views on an "exit strategy," which he said American officials

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had begun discussing publicly. Nazarov said he and his boss (Security Council head Patrushev) did not agree with the American idea that increasing troop levels would tamp down the insurgency, warning they could instead feed it by stoking enmity among more Afghans. Instead, Nazarov said an anti-terror campaign should rely more heavily on special forces and intelligence, using a range of methods, reliable sources and cooperation with allies. Pressed, Nazarov acknowledged population security is important and agreed training of police and military is key.

¶6. (C) Nazarov expressed gratitude for Holbrooke's candor in acknowledging the U.S. role in sponsoring mujahaddin in the 1980s that have since transmuted into terrorist groups now fighting against the GOA and ISAF. Nazarov concurred with Holbrooke's characterization of our countries' unique responsibilities in this region, stating that cooperation in Afghanistan would be one worthy way to build a post-Cold War relationship.

¶7. (C) Borodavkin, Ryabkov and Nazarov each committed Russia to continuing and expanding its cooperation with the U.S. in pursuing its objectives and to exploring additional bilateral assistance to Afghanistan's military, police and counter-narcotics officials as well as to economic development.

RECONCILIATION/RESOLUTION 1267

¶8. (C) SRAP Holbrooke discussed, in hypothetical terms, possibilities for bringing some members of the Taliban into mainstream politics, stressing that such a process would be Afghan-led, would require those involved to renounce violence and would not include Al Qaida fighters. For example, Holbrooke said if an individual Talib renounced Taliban leader Mullah Omar, there should be some latitude for a discussion. MFA Director Zamir Kabulov retorted that those who renounce Omar are no longer Taliban members by definition. Borodavkin also articulated the GOR position that "there is no chance of peace with the Taliban -- they are violent extremists." However, later in the conversation he agreed with Holbrooke's assessment that the Taliban cannot

be defeated militarily and a political strategy is also required. Holbrooke emphasized that contrary to rumors no U.S. representatives, military or civilian, have any contact with the Taliban.

¶9. (C) Holbrooke noted the international community is going to need to help facilitate Karzai's interest in reaching out to internal opponents. One element of this is improving the 1267 list by removing as well as adding names. He urged the GOR to reconsider its refusal to remove names of people who no longer fit the criteria and offered to provide full details on the rationale for each case. . Borodavkin said the Russian position is not "cast in stone" but that all additions and deletions must be well founded. Holbrooke promised to follow up and arrange a separate meeting on this topic with appropriate officials in the future.

SCO/CSTO/OSCE

¶10. (C) Officials at both MFA and the Security Council urged greater international cooperation between the U.S.-NATO and the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization). They said CSTO is particularly active in combating narcotics in Afghanistan's northern neighbors through its "Channel" program, whose goal is to establish tighter law-enforcement coordination among former Soviet countries along the northern route. The participating countries (Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Belarus and Russia) also exchange information on financing. Canal organizes twice-annual crack-downs on drug traffickers transiting Central Asia and Russia en route from Afghanistan. This, according to Nazarov, is the "single organized effort coordinated among Afghanistan's neighbors." Nazarov said the CSTO is not Russia-dominated; though its secretariat is located in Moscow, the organization operates by consensus and "all members are equal." Holbrooke said the U.S. would be willing to explore project-specific cooperation with CSTO on topics of mutual interest, such as Afghanistan. He noted this administration had established U.S. relations with the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) and plans to maintain those ties.

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¶11. (C) On OSCE, Borodavkin declined to reconsider Russia's refusal to support OSCE-sponsored projects inside Afghanistan because it is not a member of OSCE. He said, however, that Russia is ready to have more Afghans trained in Central Asian countries. Holbrooke also requested Russian views on Kazakh President Nazerbayev's desire to hold a summit meeting on Afghanistan during Kazakhstan's 2010 tenure as OSCE Chairman, noting the U.S. opposes the idea of an OSCE summit in 2010 but has not yet reached a position on a summit if it were not associated with the OSCE. Borodavkin replied that Russia would oppose an OSCE summit on Afghanistan for the reasons cited above, but had not yet heard of the other proposal.

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

¶12. (C) SRAP Holbrooke walked through U.S. intentions to intensify international diplomacy following Karzai's inauguration, specifically by improving communication among his counterparts through the "SRAP Collective." Borodavkin embraced the idea, noting that previous efforts to coordinate the group had been haphazard. He said Kabulov, who just returned from an assignment as Russian Ambassador in Kabul, will assume the role of Russia's Afghanistan coordinator and there are also plans to create an inter-agency group under his leadership. Holbrooke welcomed this and said Russia's participation sends a "powerful signal" to the world community. Holbrooke also noted he plans to visit Central Asia soon, but wanted to come to Moscow first.

PAKISTAN

¶13. (C) Holbrooke emphasized the core role of Pakistan in international terrorism, noting that two recently uncovered plots in the U.S. both had links with Pakistan. He said the GOP has improved its posture in fighting this menace, but more is needed; hence continuous engagement, most recently NSA Jones's visit there the previous week. Borodavkin said Russia echoes these messages in its communications with Pakistan.

¶14. (C) Nazarov expressed profound skepticism about Pakistan's capacity to fight terrorism. He said the ISI and other elements of the Pakistani army are still using terrorist groups, including the Taliban, to conduct a "private war" (against Kabul). He contended that some U.S. military assistance to Islamabad ends up in the hands of terrorists and that Pakistani intelligence supports linkages among far-flung terrorist groups from Arab countries, Uighers and Chechens. He also noted that a troop build-up will mean additional convoys flowing through northern Pakistan and each one will need to pay local war-lords for safe passage and that that money will also end up supporting terrorist groups. He urged additional intelligence exchanges on these terrorist groups. Following Ambassador Beyrle's suggestion, Nazarov and Holbrooke agreed such exchanges could take place through the Bi-national Presidential Commission's intelligence group.

NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING

¶15. (C) Russian interlocutors stressed their alarm at the increase in heroin production and export since 2001. Nazarov acknowledged that the last year had seen a slight improvement, but still heroin production in Afghanistan has increased by a factor of 40 since the beginning of the decade. Nazarov added that the drug trade partially finances terrorism, which could spread north into Central Asia and even southern Russia.

¶16. (C) Holbrooke outlined the rationale for the USG reversing the policy of eradication of poppy fields: the eradication affected only a small percentage of the cultivated area and it drove poor farmers into the hands of the Taliban. In addition, the policy inadvertently made the U.S. take sides in local battles among drug-lords. By focusing on shutting down drug bazaars, arresting drug barons and putting more energy towards interdiction, the U.S. is seeing some positive results while, according to intelligence, Taliban leaders are displeased.

¶17. (C) Nazarov appreciated Holbrooke's presentation, but

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maintained that the U.S. approach is a comprehensive strategy with a missing piece -- eradication. "It is difficult to explain to the Russian public why you eradicate in Colombia but not in Afghanistan." (Note: while Nazarov disagreed with Holbrooke, he is clearly more open to a discussion than the head of the Federal Narcotics Control Service, Viktor Ivanov, who categorically stated that eradication is the only way to deal with the problem. If Russian officials such as Nazarov can be persuaded that the new approach is reducing the flow of recruits to the Taliban and reducing the flow of narcotics, it may be possible to change the GOR position.)

Beyrle